Project Closeout Report

Project Name: PERSLink

Agency: North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System

Project Sponsor: Sparb Collins

Project Manager: Sharon Schiermeister

Objectives		
	Measurements	
Project Objectives	Met/ Not Met	Description
Complete the project on or under budget with the full scope completed	Met	The appropriated budget for the project is $9,594,000. It was determined that PERS Staffing costs should also be included as part of the budget and tracked. Therefore, an additional $980,214 was added to the budget to reflect PERS Staff time, resulting in a total budget of $10,502,214.
Complete the project on schedule with the full scope completed. The project will be implemented using phased roll-outs	Partially Met	The project is scheduled to be completed by September 30, 2010 The first rollout was completed on October 1, 2008 which deployed functionality for the call center, upfront imaging and workflow. The second rollout was completed on October 3, 2010 which deployed 98% of the business functionality and Employer Self Service on-schedule as noted above. However, NDPERS decided to delay rolling out the Member Self Service functionality until it could be determined that NDPERS members would have minimal issues with the interface. The study and change requests that resulted delayed the rollout of that functionality until September 2012.
Transition to the new system without interrupting operations so that the transition is transparent to the membership	Partially Met	• Maintain at least the same level of customer service satisfaction ratings as measured on the report cards • Continue processing monthly retirement payments, benefit enrollments, new retirements, refund requests, insurance premiums, retirement contributions and deferred comp contributions within timeframes currently in place Throughout the project, NDPERS was able to maintain operations and consistent levels of service to our customers. However, the deployment in October 2010 introduced significant change not only to NDPERS staff, but also to our participating employers. At that time, we experienced delays processing retirement and deferred comp contributions, as well as being able to respond to employer questions within our customary timeframes. This improved within 12 months after go-live.
The new system will need to be adaptable to future benefit changes and requirements.	Met	Within 6 months after the system is fully implemented, NDPERS staff will have the training and experience to make routine changes to the system, such as parameters, business rules and other table driven elements

Get membership to use web based self-service functionality to change personal information (such as address, designation of beneficiary) freeing up staff to handle more complex requests	Partially Met	10% of such transactions will be handled via Self-Service within 6 months; 50% will be handled via Self-Service within 2 years. Member Self Service has not yet been fully deployed to all of the membership, therefore, transactions can only be conducted through self service by a limited number of people. The initial deployment in September 2012 was a pilot for employees of 12 pilot employers. These employers covered approximately 5,200 active employees. During the annual enrollment season, 1,372 employees used MSS to make their 2013 annual enrollment elections. Also, from September 2012 – December 2012, 5,996 plan enrollments or enrollment changes were submitted through MSS. Over 95% of the transactions for these employees were handled via self-service.
Get employers to use web based self-service functionality for enrollments, terminations, changes in status and payroll reporting, freeing up staff to handle exceptions, rather than normal processing.	Met	Employers representing 90% of the members will be handled via self-service within 6 months of go-live Employers representing 99% of the members were handled via self-service the first month of go-live.
Capture the institutional knowledge of NDPERS in the business rules of the system or other documentation related to the project	Met	At go-live, the business rules for the following processes will be captured in the new business system, including documentation on exception processing; eligibility, enrollments, terminations, refunds/rollovers, retirements, deaths, service purchases, employer reporting, benefit estimates, court orders, disabilities.
Reduce the number of business function spreadsheets currently used by staff by integrating information into the new system	Met	Eliminate 50% of the spreadsheets within 3 months of go-live; 80% within 6 months
Improve integration with vendors (insurance carriers, deferred comp providers, PeopleSoft payroll) to reduce duplicate data entry and the transfer of paper	Partially Met	• PeopleSoft payroll: Information such as address changes and benefit enrollments will only need to be entered once, instead of multiple times (NDPERS, employees, employers) • Insurance, retirement and deferred comp vendors: Information such as address changes and benefit enrollments/changes will only need to be entered once, instead of multiple times (NDPERS, vendor) NDPERS was able to successfully improve integration with the vendors for the insurance plans, DC retirement plan and deferred comp companion plan which eliminated duplicate data entry and the transfer of paper. The integration with the State and Higher Ed PeopleSoft payroll system has not been fully accomplished yet. This has been determined to be a worthwhile objective and will continue to be pursued in 2013.
All benefit plans are integrated on the new system	Met	At go-live, all benefit plans, with the exception of FlexComp claims processing, will be integrated on the new system

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Schedule Objectives					
Met/ Not Met	Original Baseline Schedule (in Months)	Final Baseline Schedule (in Months)	Actual Schedule (in Months)	Variance to Original Baseline	Variance to Final Baseline
Met	34	34	34	On Schedule	On Schedule
Not Met	34	53	57	67.6% OVER	7.2% OVER

Notes:

1. The first line refers to the implementation of the Line of Business functionality completed on 10/3/2010. This implementation made 98% of the entire PERSLink project functionality available to NDPERS users and employers.
2. The second line refers to the implementation of the remaining Member Self Service web functionality completed on 09/04/2012. This functionality was part of the original project plan. However, the decision was made to delay implementation of this feature so the project rebaselined the schedule after the initial go-live.

Budget Objectives					
Met/ Not Met	Original Baseline Budget	Final Baseline Budget	Actual Costs	Variance to Original Baseline	Variance to Final Baseline
Met	10,502,214	10,502,214	10,069,779	432,435 Under Budget (4.1%)	432,435 Under Budget (4.1%)

Major Scope Changes

Scope changes were identified as part of JAD sessions and during User Acceptance Testing as either new requirements or functionality enhancements. As agreed contractually, the PERSLink Project Management team tracked and monitored additions and deletions of requirements and the net amount was summarized in Change Orders. A total of 10 Change Orders were issued for a total of $421,740 that came out of the PERSLink Project Contingency Fund. The Steering Committee was informed monthly. The table below is an example of the Enhancements summary presented to the Steering Committee. Nine of these changes did not impact the schedule.

The most significant change was the decision to postpone the deployment of the Member Self Service functionality and conduct a usability study. This change impacted both schedule and cost:

- The impact on the schedule is highlighted in the Schedule section above
- The impact on cost has the following components
    - Usability study = $ 46,610.29
    - Additional Sagitec cost = Sagitec agreed to support the new schedule at no additional cost, except for the changes identified as enhancements which totaled $121,176

Lessons Learned

The PERSLink team conducted a total of 15 lessons learned sessions throughout the life of the project. The lessons learned sessions focused on identifying what is working well and areas of improvement. Specific actions were taken to implement suggested changes in the next phase of the project. A complete list of all lessons learned sessions is stored on the NDPERS SharePoint site.

Here is a summary of what worked well:

- Management and sponsor support of the project were at the right level. There was no interference in day to day project activities. The NDPERS Project Manager was given the appropriate level of decision-making authority.
- Team work, cooperation, and open communication between NDPERS, Sagitec, LRWL and ITD. Issues were handled as a team with a problem-solving approach, rather than being adversarial.
- Using SharePoint as the central repository for project documents allowed all members of the project team to access and share documents, regardless of where they were located – on-site, off-site or off-shore.
- The defined process for gathering requirements through Joint Application Design (JAD) sessions and documenting the requirements and business flows in the Use Case documents.

- Hiring a usability consultant to assist with the design of Member Self Service, conduct usability studies and provide recommendations was directly related to successful deployment and user acceptance of MSS.

Here is a summary of what needed improvement:

- Have more of a phased implementation, even if it adds extra effort
- Assign dedicated resources from client and vendor side, early in the project, to manage data conversion. Vendor resource should spend as much time as possible on-site.
- Take time to review training materials even if it means delaying go live. Training should cover business life cycle.
- Perform life cycle and integration testing prior to going live, even if it means delaying go-live.
- Employers should have been involved in testing Employer Self Service to identify usability issues prior to go-live.

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Success Stories

The most relevant success story was the implementation of the PERSLink project Line of Business functionality on time and within budget as detailed below. This project resulted in a complete change in how NDPERS staff performed their duties, how NDPERS passed information to their vendors, how participating employers submitted information and conduct business with NDPERS, and how members interact with NDPERS.

Partnership for success

Software development projects typically have a long life cycle with the participation of people from multiple areas and backgrounds that go through periods of intense work together. It is common to have three or more companies that join efforts and provide the people to work together to accomplish the project.

Leadership plays an important role in this process and, as we discuss here, partnership is the key for success. The PERSLink project included four major organizations:

- **North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System (NDPERS)** – sponsored the project, provided business process expertise and participated with a Core Team including the roles of Project Sponsor, Project Manager, Benefits and Accounting Experts, IT Staff
- **Sagitec Solutions, LLC** – proposed the solution to meet NDPERS requirements, based on Neospin Framework and participated with a team including the roles of Project Manager, Delivery Manager, Functional Analyst, Technical Architect, Developer and Communication specialist.
- **L. R. Wechsler, Ltd. (LRWL)** – developed the initial Request for Proposal and participated with the roles of Oversight Project Manager and Q/A
- **North Dakota Information Technology Department (ITD)** – responsible for the IT infrastructure to support the application and participated with a team including the roles of Large Project Oversight Analyst (LPOA), Technical Architect, Developer and DBA

The PERSLink project started in October 2007 and immediately the implementation team confronted the challenge of working together despite having never done so. The underlying structure for their partnership was the intentional team-building that started during the first week of the project and continued throughout the project's entire life cycle. Early on the team embraced a team-building process as a way to work effectively together. Using the basic concepts from the book The Team Handbook, by Peter R. Scholtes, they reviewed the phases of team-building, established ground rules for working together, and set the procedures for periodic reviews of the team-building process and for capturing lessons learned.

As one of the first team building exercises, the team defined their mission:

"We commit to successfully implement a robust, reliable, secure web-enabled, integrated benefit administration system that improves NDPERS' business operations and service."

During the early days of the project, the team encountered challenges and celebrated early accomplishments. Together, they assured that all system functionality was analyzed and documented according to Use Case specifications, that the software was developed and tested properly, and that documentation was created to record the impact to workflow. After the completion of each major phase of the project, the implementation team conducted a lessons learned session and captured what worked well and what needed to change for each phase.

As the project moved on, involvement from NDPERS staff was critical as the team progressed into User Acceptance Testing, Online Help Documentation review, Training, Data Conversion and Migration, and Deployment of the new PERSLink system into production. The final implementation also required significant effort, led by the NDPERS PERSLink Core Team, to transform NDPERS business processes and effectively use the new system functionality.

Each participant company played an important and unique role in the partnership throughout the project life cycle. The LRWL Project Manager was very effective in supporting the NDPERS Project Manager, working with Sagitec in the development and execution of decision processes for Scope Management, Issue Management and Risk Management, and identifying and helping find the solution to issues as they impacted team performance and schedule. The LRWL QA role successfully supported the completion of User Acceptance Testing, User training and change management. The LRWL QA role was also very effective in supporting the review and approval of deliverables and Contract Management.

Sagitec brought a team of functional and technical experts with the tools and methodology appropriate for projects of this scale and facilitated the team-building process and the entire software development and implementation process.

ITD played a very important role, working with Sagitec to define and implement the technical architecture, providing expertise in key areas such as integration of PERSLink with Filenet. ITD architects, engineers and DBA participated in weekly project conference calls during the critical phases of the project to effectively address issues as they were identified and follow-up on action items.

The Steering Committee played a key role in overseeing the project and supporting the team. ITD LPOA and NDPERS Project Sponsor support of the project were at the right level. There was no interference in day to day project activities. Monthly steering committee reports and NDPERS Project Manager updates at weekly NDPERS manager meetings kept them sufficiently in the loop on the project status.

The NDPERS Core Team continuously worked with the Sagitec Project Team and LRWL to complete the planning of all the tasks and required resources from NDPERS, Sagitec and ITD, to implement the new PERSLink system in October 2010.

Result

Through effective partnership in project management, the team accomplished their mission to deliver a state-of-the-industry benefits administration solution on time and within budget. PERSLink went live successfully on October 4, 2010.

So, what were the major ingredients of the team's partnership that lead to a successful project? We believe seven factors played a role:

1. Shared team goals

All team players committed to the goal of implementing PERSLink by the agreed-upon deadline of October 2010. To accomplish the project mission as the team defined it, everyone came to the table with specific project goals from their own companies.

2. Trust and understanding

Through the team-building process, the team became very familiar with each other and learned to listen, understand and trust. They knew they had successfully achieved the "Performing Stage" of Scholtes' stages of team development when all team members understand each other's strengths and weakness and supported each other to achieve the goals of the team.

3. Team process

The PERSLink team exercised very open communication and always relied on the team processes to resolve issues and conflicts whenever they arrived. This does not mean that everyone agreed on every decision, but the team achieved consensus by admitting that everyone could support the decision and dedicate their efforts to implement it

4. Open feedback

Through formal lessons-learned sessions or through other forms of communication, the team exercised open feedback to both reinforce positive behavior and influence change in unwanted behavior. The feedback was captured during both the lessons-learned sessions and the project review meetings. Then, it was incorporated into the process whenever it made sense.

5. Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities

The Project Management Plans covered all major elements of project management, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities for planning, execution, tracking and monitoring, decision making and oversight.

6. Clear Communications

Communications included a variety of forms both written and verbal. The written communication was done through email and extensive documentation maintained in the PERSLink Portal, using SharePoint. The most valuable communication occurred in team meetings which included all major players and had specific agenda and follow-up items. A specific set of "Beneficial Behaviors" was encouraged during the meetings:

- Initiate discussions
- Balanced participation
- Seek information and opinions
- Suggest procedures for reaching a goal
- Clarify or elaborate on ideas
- Summarize
- Test for consensus
- Keep the discussion from digressing
- Compromise and be creative in resolving differences
- Try to ease tension in the group and work through difficult matters
- Get the group to agree on standards
- Refer to documentation and data
- Praise and correct others with equal firmness
- Accept both praise and complaints
- Provide feedback to other team members

7. Celebration important intermediate milestone accomplishments

Throughout the life of the project the team held celebration events at the completion of each major milestone. These were great opportunities to have some fun, improve team building and strengthen the partnership.

The successful implementation of PERSLink, delivered on time and within budget, was mainly a result of the spirit of partnership among the participants of the project. Their dedication to developing a high-performing team and to improving how the team worked together made this project a success.

Starting on October 4, 2010 and subsequent months the team stayed in place to support the initial use of the new system and successful transition into production support. PERSLink now supports all NDPERS key business process, provides interface with the Financial and Payroll System and is accessible by NDPERS customers via the web.